

Aurora mayor candidate Chapa LaVia announces economic plan



Aurora mayoral candidate Linda Chapa LaVia is surrounded by supporters Friday as she announces her three-point economic development plan. (Steve Lord / The Beacon-News)

By **Steve Lord**
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Aurora mayoral candidate **Linda Chapa LaVia** Friday announced a three-point economic development plan she says could be enacted within 120 days of her becoming mayor.

She made the announcement with about 40 supporters, some representing businesses in the city, at Jake's Bagels on North Broadway. She also received an endorsement from Terrie Simmons, director of the Women's Business Center in Aurora, which Chapa LaVia helped create.

The 14-year state representative from Aurora said while the city has done a good job at economic development, it has not been good enough, especially compared to what surrounding communities have done.

"We can and we must do a better job in Aurora," she said.

Chapa LaVia's three-point plan revolves around changing the culture of city government, educating and evaluating plans and to develop a forward direction for economic development, and executing – actually getting things done.

The plan has a number of proposals contained within it, including: a commission to review all ordinances; a needs assessment; revisiting the value of special use permits; restructuring [City Hall](#) to have a business improvement department; evaluate any and all agencies under the city's control that deal with economic development issues; evaluate all properties the city owns for redevelopment; use federal, state and private sector resources to do an exhaustive study and do a parking study.

At one point, Chapa LaVia held plans done by the city in 2005 and 2009 that she said had good ideas but were hardly implemented.

"For some reason, these sat on a shelf," she said. "Aurora has what I call leapfrog, spotty development."

Chapa LaVia's event Friday came a day after the first mayoral forum for the Feb. 28 primary in which she and her opponents, Aldermen Richard Irvin, at large, and Michael Saville, 6th Ward, and Rick Guzman, assistant chief of staff at City Hall, all agreed that economic development is one of the key issues in Aurora.

While the candidates answered questions on a variety of issues, many of those answers came down to how important it is for the city to grow its tax base and create enough revenue for taxing bodies to deal with educational opportunities, getting jobs and handling crime.

The other candidates also have programs that discuss economic development that are addressed on their websites.

Guzman has released an expanded platform that is 15 pages long on his website. On economic development, it calls for:

- Finalizing, adopting and implementing the new Downtown Master Plan being finished up by the city with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, or CMAP. The city received help from CMAP through a technical assistance grant for the plan.
- Commissioning a study and plan for a multi-cultural business district, referred to as a "Mercado Neighborhood" that is part of the 2006 Seize the Future master plan for downtown.
- Establishing and maintaining a revolving micro loan fund to give businesses access to smaller loans of between \$500 and \$25,000, which could be done through the city's Community Block Grant program.

At the forum, Guzman said he has liked the direction the city is taking with economic development, especially downtown. He said, as did other candidates, that the city needs more housing units downtown to foster more business development.

"We need to build on our strength," he said. "The arts have been bringing people downtown."

Irvin said economic development involves retaining business already in town and recruiting new business to come to town. Like Guzman, Irvin said the city needs to build its "critical mass" of people downtown, and then "businesses are going to come to cater to these people."

Irvin has proposed putting the Aurora Economic Development Commission back together. On his website, he proposed:

- Assessing the processing and systems at the city involving the ability of businesses already in the city.
- Holding government leadership accountable in recruiting of business.
- Having a citywide economic development master plan.

Saville cited what he said was his past success with economic development downtown through creation of the Riverwalk Commission, and later the [Fox](#) Overlay District that has guided the look of downtown for 30 years.

"After 30 years, downtown looks better today than it has since the 1970s," he said. "I've always been pro-business in the downtown."

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